Downham Urban District Council

ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

Medical Officer of Health

FOR THE

Year ending 31st December, 1919.

GEO. FREDK. CROSS, M.B., B.S.,

Medical Officer of Health.

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Athol House,
Downham Market,
March 2nd, 1920.

To the Chairman and Members of the
Downham Urban District Council.

Gentlemen,

I have much pleasure in presenting you with my report of the Sanitary Conditions and of the work done in the District during the past year.

Natural and Social Conditions.

Downham Market is a small town situated in South West Norfolk, and borders on the Great Fen Land. It is built on a slope towards the West, and the higher parts of the town are nearly 100 feet above the lower and there is therefore a good natural drainage.

The subsoil consists of sand, sandstone, and green sand rocks in the upper parts and clay in the lower.

The area of the district is 1002 acres and the population at the census of 1911 was 2497.

During the past four years there have unnecessarily been many changes and a shifting population and it would be difficult to correctly estimate the population which, considering that there are no empty houses and that there are newly

married people who cannot find houses and others who find difficultly in getting lodgings, cannot be taken at less than 2,250.

The Town itself although the houses are somewhat crowded together is very clean and the streets well kept. It may be regarded as a businesslike and prosperous town, and with few really poor people.

The chief occupation of the inhabitants are those connected with a small agricultural town, there being no trades injurious to health. Amongst the larger industries may be mention a flour mill, maltings, nurseries and a small brewery. A large new tinware factory has recently been erected which will probably employ over 100 hands.

The rateable value for the poor rate is £10,909 and for the Urban rate £8,494, and a penny rate produces £35.

Nursing Association.

This admirable association, which is voluntarily supported, has done excellent work, and the services of the District Nurse are much appreciated especially by the poorer classes who almost without exception contribute towards the funds. The Nurse also continues to supervise children born in the district until they reach the age of one year.

Through the efforts of the Hospital Sunday Fund Committee there have been ample admission orders.

A Red Cross Ambulance Van is now stationed in the Town, available for any one residing within a radius of 15 miles.

Sanitary Circumstances.

Water.

The Mains of the Wisbech Water Works Company pass through the town and provides a water of excellent quality and constant quantity. The larger part of the Town is so supplied. During the year after the service of Statutory Notices the water was laid on to 6 additional houses.

In other parts of the town there are Wells, mostly shallow. The water in these is of doubtful purity, and samples when sent for Analysis are generally condemned. But no ill effects have been evident for some years.

Sewerage.

The Surveyor reports that the Sewerage Plant has been working smoothly and effectively, and the wear in Machinery is considerably diminished through the erection of a grit chamber, whilst the effluent is greatly improved.

Scavenging.

This work is carried on under the supervision of the Surveyor who reports it as being satisfactory. On previous occasions I have called your attention to the receptacles which the scavenger has to empty. There is no improvement in this direction. Every house should have at least one decent pail which can be lifted easily and without spilling the contents on the path.

The Roads and Streets are well kept, but of course at increased charges. The dumping of thousands of tons of Hay and Straw near the Railway has given the staff a busy time.

Closet Accommodation.

There are 464 w.c's connected with the sewers.
14 w c's not connected, sewers not being available.
14 earth closets.

A number of vaults still remain, but are gradually being abolished.

Sanitary Work and Inspection.

This is carried out by your Inspector who reports.

(*a*) Number and nature of Inspections. No. record kept but frequent inspections are made and any complaint instantly enquired into.

(*b*) Notices served. Statutory 5.
Informal 6 written and numerous verbal.

(*c*) Results. All complied with.

Number of closing orders. None. But one closing order became operative, and the necessary work was carried out.

Number of Demolition Orders. None.

Other Sanitary Work.

6 houses disinfected.
6 refuge heaps removed.

10 stable manure heaps removed.
4 dirty yards cleaned.
12 vaults emptied.
1 complete new set of drains put in.
1 cistern cleaned.
2 defective roofs remedied.
11 defective drains remedied.
1 defective w.c. remedied.
1 fowls kept as nuisance remedied.

Overcrowding.

10 cases. 9 abated, 7 by removal from district.

Dairies and Cowsheds.

There are 6 registered Dairies with 97 cows. and there has been no shortage of milk.

Defective drainage has been remedied in one case after the service of a statutory order.

The remaining 5 were satisfactory. One new Dairy was registered.

Vans.

Great trouble has been experienced by Van dwellers and no less than 20 have been removed during the year. Proceedings were taken against 3, two of whom were fined, the third against whom a warrant was issued, cannot be traced.

Foods.

No legal action has been taken. A consignment of dates, fish and tinned meat was condemned.

Slaughter Houses and Bakehouses.

Periodical inspections made. All satisfactory. 5 carcasses were viewed and 4 condemned.

Prevalence of and control over Infectious Diseases.

The health of the district has been good throughout the year, and the district has been remarkably free from Infectious diseases. Several diseases have recently been added to the list of notifiable diseases, whilst the compulsory notification of measles has been withdrawn.

There is no Isolation Hospital in the District so the difficulty of checking a serious outbreak is increased.

Scarlet Fever.

Six cases of Scarlet fever were reported, of this number 5 were in one house. There has been some difficulty in distinguishing cases of scarlet fever from German Measles or Epidemic Roseola, which diseases was reported in 13 houses. It may be that Scarlet fever is taking a much milder form, as diseases sometimes do when occuring in limited outbreaks, or that the epidemic which has been prevalent in the neighbourhood is what has been termed the fourth disease or Erythema Infectiosum. At any rate the epidemic has been of a mild type with no serious sequælae. In a few cases there has followed as light desquamation, and there have been a few instances were the illness has been so slight as to escape notification altogether. From these unrecognised cases other children have been infected and this probably accounts for the continuation of the disease into the present year.

Tuberculosis of the Lungs.

One case only was notified.

Pneumonia, Malaria and Dysentery Regulations, 1919.

One case of Malaria and one case of Influenza and Pneumonia notified.

No cases of Venereal Diseases have been notified.

Housing.

There are 650 houses in the District of which 349 may be considered as houses of the working classes. No new houses have been erected during the year. There are no empty houses, and no buildings or houses suitable for conversion into flats.

In 1914 I made a special report on the housing, and conditions have not altered to any great extent. There were 21 cottages with only one, 211 with two, 101 with three, and 15 with four bedrooms. A number of these smaller cottages are very indifferent and suitable only for old couples or single persons.

It must be sometime before the actual requirements of the town can be ascertained seeing that the present population cannot be considered as stationary. Some will no doubt return to where they resided before the war. The population has varied little during the past and there is little prospect of any marked increase unless more accommodation is provided. The shortage of houses is accentuated by the fact that houses have been acquired by persons coming to reside either temporarily or permanently, and by the difficulty of the newly married and others in obtaining houses, or even finding lodgings.

I am of opinion that at least 50 new houses are required for the working classes alone. The new Housing Scheme contemplates the erection in due course of 24 houses. A suitable site has been acquired and the lay-out plans for 6 houses have been approved, and estimates are being worked out.

It is hoped that these will be completed during the year.

The general condition of the houses are good and quite up to the standard of towns of this size. There is no real overcrowding, all the more serious cases having been dealt with.

There are no unhealthy areas.

There are no Building Byelaws.

The orders for Tents and Vans are enforced.

Notices under section 50 (P.H.A.) are served early in the year on all keepers of animals.

The water supply is improving.

The closet accommodation also.

The chief defects found on inspection of houses have been absence of damp courses, brick floors, leaky roof, defective guttering and spouting, no proper food storage, and want of efficient ventilation.

Action was taken under section 15 H.T.P.A. in respect of 8 houses.

Difficulty has been caused through shortage of labour, cost of material and unwillingness on the part of owners to incur expense.

Vital Statistics.

The total number of deaths registered in the District was 46, males 19, females 27.

Of the 13 deaths in the Howdale Home 10 are transferred to other districts. On the other hand 5 persons dying elsewere but belonging to the district are included in the net total of 41 deaths.

Thirty-two persons out of 46 died over 70 years of age, and the causes of death call for no comment.

There are two deaths from Tuberculosis of the lungs.

The number of Births registered was 52, of which number 31 were males and 21 females.

There were 6 Illegitimate Births.

Infantile Mortality.

Only 3 children died under one year of age. All these died within a few hours of birth. Two were twins prematurely born. The other also was a premature brith.

I am Gentlemen,

Your obedient Servant,

GEO. FREDK. CROSS, M.B., B.S.,

Medical Officer of Health.

CAUSES OF DEATH.	Deaths at the subjoined ages of Residences occuring in the District.								Total Deaths of residents in Institutions in the District.
	All ages	Under 1 year	2 and under 5 years	5 and under 15 years	15 and under 25 years	25 and under 45 years	45 and under 65 years	65 years and over	
Measles	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Influenza	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Pulmonary Tuberculosis...	2	...	...	...	...	2	...	...	...
Tubercular Meningitis ...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Cancer, Malignant Disease	5	...	...	...	...	...	3	2	...
Organic Heart Disease ...	18	...	...	...	...	...	2	8	8
Bronchitis	7	...	...	...	...	...	2	5	...
Pneumonia	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Diarrhœa and Enteritis ...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Nephritis and Bright's Disease	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Congential Debility and Malformation, including Premature Birth ...	3	3	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Violent Deaths, excluding Suicide	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Suicide	1	...	...	...	1	...	...	...	...
Other defined Disease ...	10	...	...	...	...	1	...	4	5
Totals	46	3	...	...	1	3	7	19	13

Net Deaths in District 41

Net Births in the year { Legitimate 46
Illegitimate 6

Total 52